



Approved For Release 2002/04/30 : CIA-RDP80T00942A001200010002-9

# Soviet Foreign Policy On the Eve of the Summit

An Intelligence Assessment

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## An Intelligence Assessment

*Information as of 12 June 1979 has been used  
in preparing this report.*

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This paper has been coordinated with the National  
Intelligence Officers. [redacted]

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**Soviet Foreign Policy  
On the Eve of the Summit**

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**Key Judgments**

The Soviets would like to use the US-USSR summit meeting to restore the notion of the centrality of Soviet-American relations in world politics, to counter the diplomatic activity of China, and to demonstrate that important US interests could be affected as a result of changes in relations with the USSR. They have been dissatisfied with the state of Soviet-American relations and want the summit to impart a more positive tone and foster the impression of greater stability and, if possible, of restored forward momentum. This in turn is intended to head off the dangers that the USSR perceives in China's rapprochement with the United States and to promote the process of detente in Europe. Moscow also wants to impress on its clients that its relationship with the United States is helpful to their interests, although Moscow cannot be perceived as sacrificing the interests of its clients to detente.

The Soviets can be expected to insist on resolving regional conflicts on their own terms. They will take a major share of credit for "stabilizing" the situations in Angola and Ethiopia, and will not see any merit in peaceful solutions in Africa that might help the United States and the West salvage their own interests. The Soviets will be particularly assertive in responding to the recent Egyptian-Israeli treaty, which Moscow will interpret as evidence of US exploitation of Soviet geopolitical weakness in the Middle East. President Brezhnev will be concerned with the possibility of an increased US military role in both Egypt and Israel, reminiscent of US monitoring in the Sinai following the disengagement agreements in 1974 and 1975.

The Soviets are likely to be more defensive and even truculent in those areas where they perceive US manipulation of Soviet anxieties over China's relations with the USSR and the United States. The Soviets have been worried about the possibility of improved Sino-US relations since the end of the Cultural Revolution 10 years ago ushered in a new phase of Chinese foreign policy. Moscow's positive response to China's recent bid for talks aimed at improved relations was designed in part to bolster the USSR's tactical position before the summit.

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## Soviet Foreign Policy On the Eve of the Summit

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As the summit approaches, President Brezhnev and the Soviet leadership can view their country's position in the world with considerable satisfaction. The current balance of military power has markedly reduced the likelihood of major reversals in central areas of Soviet interest in Europe and in the standoff with China. Soviet strength has also reduced the probability of unmanageable crises in the Middle East and Africa. There may be domestic crises in Eastern Europe, but the Soviets remain confident that they can be confronted without risk of military intervention by the West.

Part of the Soviet mood is a sense of momentum during Brezhnev's stewardship in the USSR's favor in the Third World. This is largely a matter of growth relative to the United States and the West as a whole, which finds Soviet international prestige on a more solid footing today than was the case in Khrushchev's day. In the Middle East, the fall of the Shah and the signing of an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty has created a more congenial policy environment for them to exploit. They are likely to draw some encouragement about their prospects in Africa following successful interventions in Angola and Ethiopia. Successes in Africa have also enhanced the development of a strong, long-term relationship with Cuba, and the Soviets are probably anticipating opportunities for acquiring stable and relatively hospitable partners like Fidel Castro.

### *Differences over Africa.*

The Soviets have already given notice that they are not impressed with the US argument that their actions in Africa have broken the unwritten rules of detente. The Soviets will take a major share of credit for "stabilizing" the situations in Angola and Ethiopia, and they will argue with their US counterparts that Africa should not be allowed to affect important questions of East-West relations. The Soviets realize that they are newcomers in Africa, and they are sensitive to any suggestion that they do not have at least as much right to be involved as other outside powers. They believe

their own propaganda, moreover, and regard Western influence in Africa as a relic of the colonial past. Clearly, the Soviets believe that the "wheel of history" is turning in their direction on the African continent.

Mindful of US accusations about Soviet activities in Africa, Brezhnev will probably respond by criticizing the United States for trying to weaken the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe and to isolate the black nationalist leadership in southern Africa. He might attempt to use the summit meetings to learn more about US efforts to deal with southern Africa, and he will be sensitive to the suspicion of Soviet clients that Moscow's position in Africa could be mortgaged to detente and SALT II. The Soviet leadership believes that it holds one of the keys to solving the major confrontations on the continent and will insist that the US cooperate with the USSR on dealing with the Horn, Namibia, and even Zimbabwe. The Soviets will not see any merit in peaceful solutions in Africa that might help the United States and the West to salvage their own interests. Similarly, there will be no tacit Soviet acceptance of linkage, which was vigorously denied in last year's Soviet Government statement arguing that "detente certainly does not suppose an artificial holding back of the objective processes of historical development."

### *Defensive over Asia and Middle East*

The Soviets are likely to be more defensive and even truculent in those areas where they perceive US exploitation of Soviet weakness, particularly with regard to the Sino-Soviet dispute. The Soviets have been worried about the possibility of improving Sino-US relations since the end of the Cultural Revolution 10 years ago ushered in a new phase of Chinese foreign policy. From the Soviet standpoint, Beijing is capable of any perfidy, and Moscow is also dismayed at the unpredictability of the "China card" players in the US administration. As a result, Brezhnev will attempt to probe US intentions and to warn against providing the

Chinese with modern technology and military equipment. He will undoubtedly attempt to impress upon the President the deep seriousness with which Moscow views Chinese intentions and may imply, if not flatly state, that detente will be jeopardized by US preferential provision to China of high technology in civilian and military fields. Given their particular concern about the potential for Sino-Japanese-American cooperation against the Soviet interests, the Soviet delegation will try to create a more favorable basis for their own relationship with the United States.

In the past, the Soviets have undoubtedly sought agreements with the United States that could be given an anti-Chinese appearance. While such devices would suit them admirably, they can have no expectation that the United States, particularly at this stage of its relations with China, would cooperate. They nevertheless expect that a generally successful summit, in and of itself, will manifest a degree of understanding between the superpowers that will offset some of the rise in Beijing's prestige. This will be a delicate matter, in which the Soviets will not want to appear overanxious.

The Soviets will be particularly assertive in responding to the recent Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, which Moscow will interpret as evidence of US exploitation of Soviet geopolitical weakness in the Middle East. Brezhnev can be expected to point to the treaty as an example of US irresponsibility in the wake of the 1977 joint statement on the Middle East. He will be particularly concerned with the possibility of an increased US military role in both Egypt and Israel, reminiscent of US monitoring in the Sinai following the disengagement agreements in 1974 and 1975.

Soviet officials were extremely tough on issues connected with the treaty, refusing to accept the treaty as an accomplished fact and volunteering their negative position on the deployment of the UN Emergency Force to monitor the withdrawal.

Several Soviet officials have already indicated that the USSR will try to block implementation of the treaty by vetoing the use of UN forces in the Sinai to supervise the withdrawal of Israeli forces. Soviet officials at the

United Nations have begun a campaign to organize Security Council opposition to UN monitoring of the treaty's provisions, but the summit could nevertheless provide an opportunity for the Soviets to seek a compromise to avoid placing Moscow on the side of the radical Arabs in the area. Nevertheless, given Moscow's position in the Middle East as odd man out, the most important determinant of its veto will be the Arab consensus on this issue.

#### *Other Aspects of the Third World*

The Soviets will be particularly interested in reviewing trouble spots in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, and they might expect to be credited for their restraint in these areas.

for example, the Soviets have referred to their "reasonable" behavior during the Sino-Vietnamese war as opposed to the "hostile actions" of the Chinese. The Soviets could refer to additional evidence of "caution" in their behavior:

- Failure to recognize the Polisario or to give significant help to Algeria in its conflict with Morocco over the Western Sahara.
- Unwillingness to get involved in the confrontations between Libya and Chad, and Tanzania and Uganda.
- Respect for the Somali frontier on the Horn of Africa and restraint in dealing with Eritrea.

Local factors played the major part in impressing on the Soviets the need for restraint in these areas, and it would be wrong to conclude that the Soviets consider themselves restrained by detente in their behavior in the Third World.

The Soviets want to impress on their clients that a special US-USSR relationship is helpful to their interest, although Moscow cannot be perceived as sacrificing the interest of their clients to detente. The Soviets have cooperated in the past on Arab-Israeli and Lebanese cease-fires and have endorsed various renewals of UN peacekeeping missions; the limits on Soviet support for Libya and the hesitancy of Soviet support for Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement also augur well for the possibility of a continued Soviet effort to avoid flash point situations in the Middle East.

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The Soviets will try to use any discussion of Asia to counter the diplomatic activity of China and to demonstrate that important US interests could be affected as a result of changes in relations with the USSR. The Soviets are likely to raise, for example, their interest in freedom of seas in the Pacific and Indian Oceans, particularly because of Moscow's geopolitical weakness in the area and its major requirements in securing access to foreign fishing grounds. The Soviets appear particularly interested in resuming the Indian Ocean arms control talks, and Brezhnev may raise the issue at the summit. The Soviets believe that the United States enjoys distinct advantages in being able to deploy land-based strike aircraft and military transport and reconnaissance flights to the region, and they regard US support facilities in the Persian Gulf/Indian Ocean region as being superior to anything that Moscow has thus far secured in Ethiopia or South Yemen.

Elsewhere in Asia, the Soviets are in a position to refrain from certain types of activities that could have a negative impact on the global relationships between the superpowers. The Soviets are in no position, for example, to influence overtly the actions of North Korea's Kim Il-song, but their continued unwillingness to supply Pyongyang with such sophisticated weaponry as MIG-23 fighter aircraft indicates that Moscow still favors the preservation of the status quo on the Korean peninsula. The extent of future Soviet use of Vietnamese air and naval bases and Moscow's willingness to modernize Vietnamese forces with advanced weaponry will determine Vietnam's future dependence on the USSR, China's perception of a threat on its southern border, and the level of Soviet-US differences over Southeast Asia.

#### *Europe on the Back Burner*

Unlike the summit in 1972, when the Soviets were pressing for West German ratification of the USSR-West German treaty and for a clear US commitment to convene a European security conference, the Soviets will presumably not make Europe a major political topic at the summit. Brezhnev will almost certainly try to prod the United States on the subject of mutual force reductions and on the "military detente" aspects of CSCE. The Soviets will try to appear as benevolent

as possible on European matters, if only to undermine the current view in NATO that the West must counter the Soviet military presence in Europe. The Soviet leadership appears to believe that Washington's push for higher defense budgets and for modernization of theater nuclear forces is responsible in part for that view. The recent Soviet emphasis on security arms control issues in dealing with European countries testifies to their concern with US steps to bolster Western resolve.

Although the main purpose of the summit meeting, in Soviet eyes, is to lift Soviet-US relations to a more amicable and more stable plane, there is always the possibility that various global issues could become irritants in the bilateral talks. In addition to the potential for discord in the Middle East over the Egyptian-Israeli treaty, there are other areas where Moscow and Washington are on opposite sides of the fence:

- Another Egyptian-Libyan clash, more than the border fighting in 1977, would find the United States and USSR at odds in their support for the protagonists.
- Both the United States and the USSR have recently increased their support for North and South Yemen, respectively, and the Soviets are also hinting at a revived insurgency by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Oman.
- Future events in Lebanon as well as the direction of Syrian-Iraqi rapprochement could have an adverse impact on the border situation between Syria and Israel.
- The Soviet-Cuban military relationship, and particularly the impact of this relationship on events in southern Africa, continues to cause difficulties.

The Persian Gulf is another potential area of dispute, with the Soviets reiterating their intention of protecting their interests in any future Iranian crisis and warning against "imperialist meddling" in a country that borders on the USSR.

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The Soviets will be particularly assertive in defending their interests in South and Southeast Asia, the region in which the Soviets judge that the United States has lost the most influence in recent years. The loss of the US position in Iran, the dissolution of the Central Treaty Organization, the advent of a pro-Soviet regime in Afghanistan, and the consolidation of Soviet ties with Vietnam must be considered key pluses in any Soviet net assessment of the area. The Soviets have once again adopted a tougher line on Pakistani and Iranian aid for the insurgency in Afghanistan, which indicates that they may have decided to justify greater aid for Kabul and are less concerned with the impact of such a decision on neighboring states.

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the Soviets were found to be particularly worried over events in both Iran and Afghanistan and therefore not willing to discuss their problems and dilemmas in the region.) The Soviets have also been laying the groundwork for a propaganda campaign aimed at embarrassing the United States at next month's UN Conference on the Indian Ocean Zone of Peace.

#### *The Future Relationship With the United States*

The current Soviet leadership has a propensity for formalizing its relationships with other powers in international documents. In the past few months, the USSR has signed treaties with states that it supports—Vietnam, Afghanistan, and Ethiopia. It has also negotiated protocols on regular bilateral consultations with key Western states with which it is not unfriendly—France, West Germany, and Canada. The Soviets regard these protocols as useful in providing continuing access to other governments, in inhibiting the other partner should it contemplate anti-Soviet actions, and in signifying a shift in regional alignments.

The Soviets may not see advantages in achieving such a relationship with the United States at this juncture, but the Soviets would like to restore the notion of the centrality of Soviet-American relations in world politics. This would permit Moscow to tell its clients that it was dealing actively with the United States on Third World trouble spots. With respect to bilateral relations, the Soviets probably judge that consultations would help to keep Soviet-US relations in reasonably good repair. Moscow also would like to have additional channels for discussing such key issues as nonproliferation and crisis management. The Soviets would expect this arrangement to impress the Chinese in particular with the limits of their potential. It also would further the sense of detente in Europe, while simultaneously causing US allies to worry about US reliability.

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